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ABSTRACT

These proceedings of the conference "Creating a Continuum of Excellence: A U.S. Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Conference," produced by SERVE in collaboration with Nova Southeastern University was held in Coral Gables, Florida, 1999. It lists keynote speakers, action planning meetings, think tanks, and titles of exemplary practice sessions, as well as a detailed description of the SERVE organization. (DFR)

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Creating a Continuum of Excellence

Conference Proceedings

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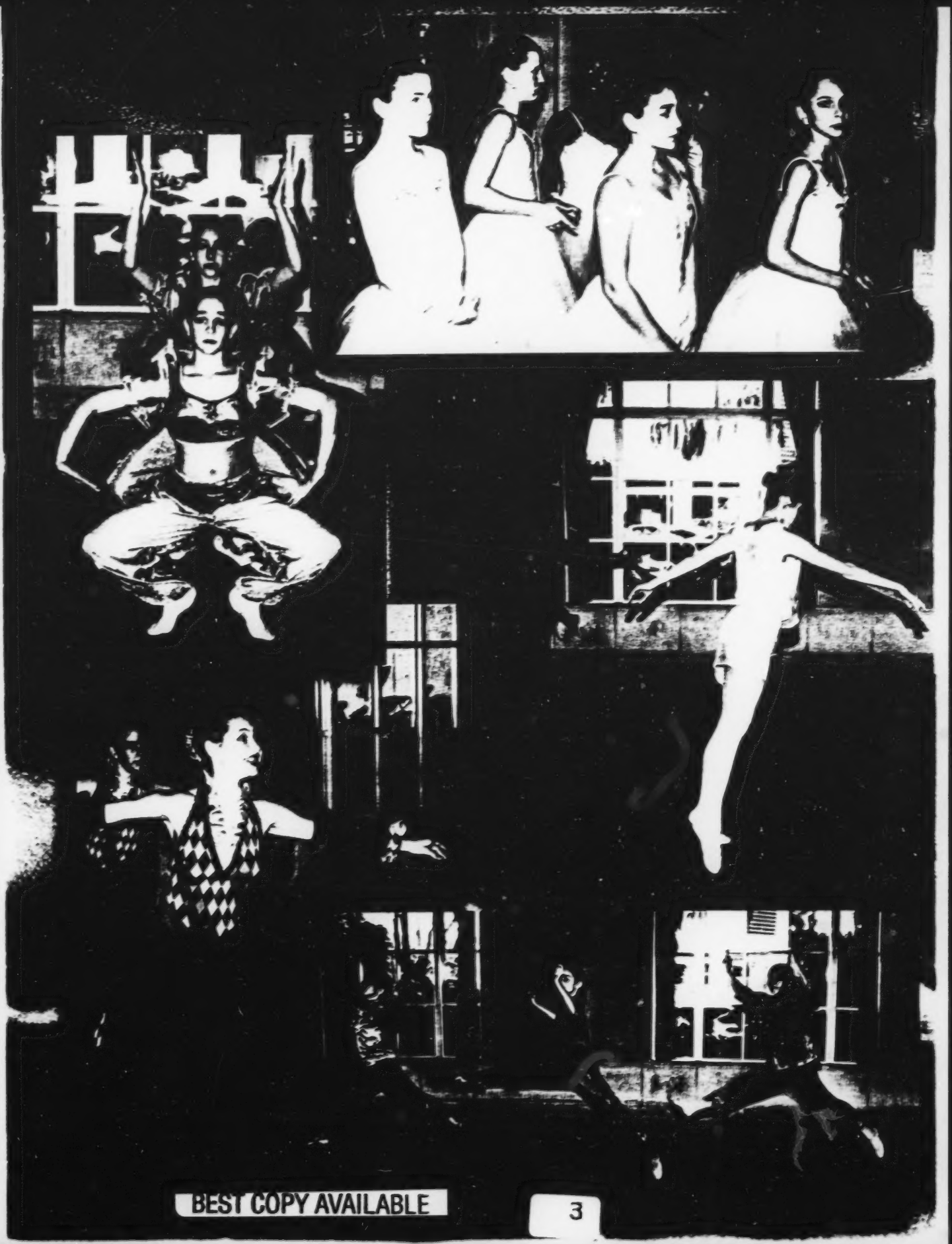

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The REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY at SERVE

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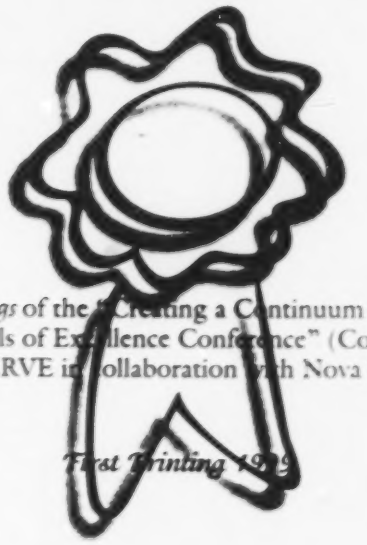

This *Proceedings* of the "Creating a Continuum of Excellence:
A U.S. Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Conference" (Coral Gables, Florida, 1999)
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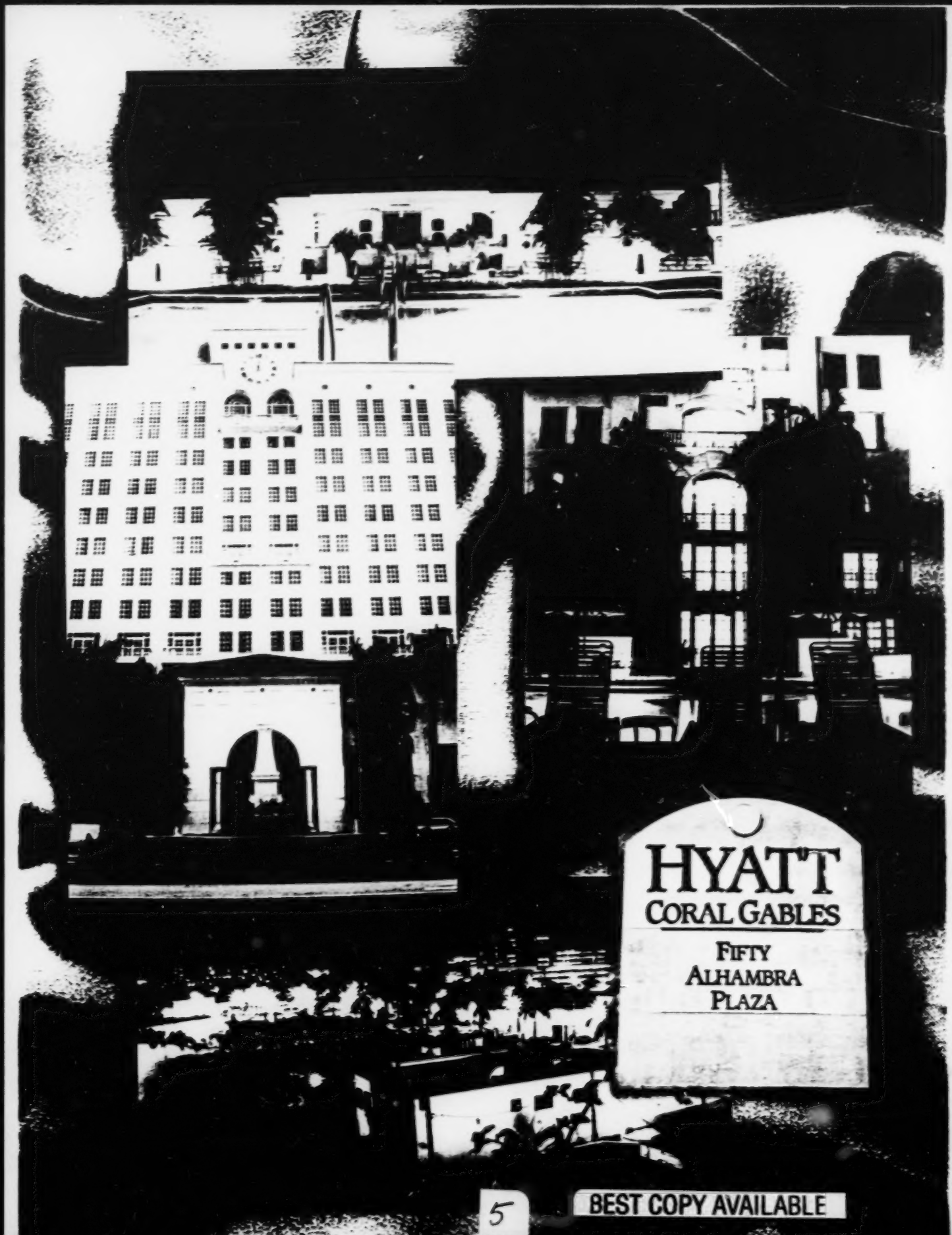

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About the SERVE Organization

SERVE is an education organization with the mission to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. To further this mission, SERVE engages in research and development that addresses education issues of critical importance to educators in the region and provides technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs that are striving for comprehensive school improvement. This critical research-to-practice linkage is supported by an experienced staff strategically located throughout the region. This staff is highly skilled in providing needs assessment services, conducting applied research in schools, and developing processes, products, and programs that inform educators and increase student achievement.

As the new millenium approaches, SERVE is preparing to address emerging 21st-century issues, such as persistent achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, massive teacher training needs, and rising numbers of limited English proficient students. Committed to a shared vision of the future of education in the region, the SERVE organization is governed by a board of directors that includes the governors, chief state school officers, and key legislators from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and representative teachers and private sector leaders. SERVE's core component is the Regional Educational Laboratory program. SERVE is one of 10 organizations, funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, that provide the services of the Regional Educational Laboratory program to all 50 states and territories. These Laboratories form a knowledge network, building a bank of information and resources shared nationally and disseminated regionally to improve student achievement locally. SERVE has additional funding from the Department in the areas of Migrant Education and School Leadership and is the lead agency in the Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Consortium for the Southeast and the Southeast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium.

Based on these funded efforts, SERVE has developed a portfolio of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding to local, regional, and national needs. Program areas include

- Assessment, Accountability, and Standards
- Children, Families, and Communities
- Education Policy
- Improvement of Science and Mathematics Education
- The Initiative on Teachers and Teaching
- School Development and Reform
- Technology in Learning

SERVE's National Specialty Area is Early Childhood Education, and the staff of SERVE's Program for Children, Families, and Communities has developed the expertise and the ability to provide leadership and support to the early childhood community nationwide for children from birth to age eight.

In addition to the program areas, the SERVE Evaluation Department supports the evaluation activities of the major grants and contracts and provides evaluation services to SEAs and LEAs in the region. Through its Publishing and Quality Assurance Department, SERVE publishes a variety of studies, training materials, policy briefs, and program products. These informative and low-cost publications include guides to available resources, summaries of current issues in education policy, and examples of exemplary educational programs. Through its programmatic, evaluation, and publishing activities, SERVE also provides contracted staff development and technical assistance in many areas of expertise to assist education agencies in achieving their school improvement goals.

SERVE's main office is at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, with major staff groups located in Tallahassee, Florida, and Atlanta, Georgia. Policy advisors are assigned to each state department of education in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Current and detailed information on any of the program and service areas noted here may be found on SERVE's site on the World Wide Web at **www.serve.org**.

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Opening Keynote Speaker—
Mary Beth Blegan

"Real Kids, Real Learning: Making the Connection"

Teacher of the Year, Mary Beth Blegan tells educators, "Good teaching changes lives."

"Kids need to know more to survive in the world we are leaving them, yet they are spending more and more time alone," Blegan comments. "They need someone to notice them." Ideally, teachers should spend a year with their students in an honest, sustained relationship, asking how they are and listening to them—knowing them and being known. Students need teachers to participate in conversations about "real stuff—thinking, questioning, doubting."

"Can we afford to dream with kids?" Blegan asks. "Can we afford not to?" Teachers need to dream with and for their students. They need to demonstrate that learning can be exciting, while providing a safe environment with room for risk-taking. Teachers can make a difference if they open lines of communication and offer respect to their students—teaching them not only specific skills, but also creating an environment open to exploring, creating, and dreaming.

Blegan asserts that students "need both structure and passion in the classroom," as she promotes more of a balance between the way students are assessed and the projects they are asked to complete. Structure and standards are important, Blegan notes, but there needs to be room for a student's interest and passion within the structure. Students need someone to care for them, to rejoice with them, and to provide challenges for them. And teachers need to put aside that which has prevented change in the past and be open to all possibilities.

Blegan believes that "schools must find new ways to continually adapt and change, a process that will require passion, power, and conviction." We need to ask what needs to be changed within schools and what needs to be done outside of schools—no longer can teachers work in isolation. Teachers, parents, administrators, and communities must work together to learn how to disagree and then move beyond the disagreements.

We are all learners together. Teachers need to help their students to a level of self-discovery so they can find their way through the uncertainty of the future. And veteran teachers need to help new teachers by supporting and mentoring them. They need to provide opportunities for new teachers to learn, rather than sacrificing them to difficult working conditions that most experienced teachers often avoid.

Ultimately, we all need to be accountable for the teaching profession. As Mary Beth Blegan says, "Stand up for good teaching; it's the most important job in the world."

Day Two General Session: Secondary Level—Jack M. Jenkins

"Everyone Wins or Everyone Loses: Strategies for Personalized Instruction"

Dr. Jack Jenkins, in his presentation to the Secondary General Session audience, emphasized that the challenge for Blue Ribbon Schools is that every student succeeds: "Every American needs to be literate and knowledgeable and skilled to compete in this global economy."

Students who fail have extremely weak cognitive processing skills, which need to be augmented or strengthened—not remediated. "Remediation teaches skills but not how to apply them," Jenkins notes. Citing the SCANS Report, Jenkins asserts that students learn skills best when they are taught in context; it creates more interest and understanding for them.

"Kids have four basic needs," says Jenkins, "to belong, to be free, to gain power, and to have fun." Schools and instruction need to be designed to satisfy those needs while keeping up with "a world changing faster than your vision statement."

Jenkins advocates personalized instruction—diagnosing students' individual needs and learning styles and providing interactive instruction and thoughtful evaluation. Personalized instruction offers coaching and advisement to the students and interaction and collegiality among teachers. It requires great thought, effort, and organization, but, Jenkins says, "That's what Blue Ribbon Schools are all about."

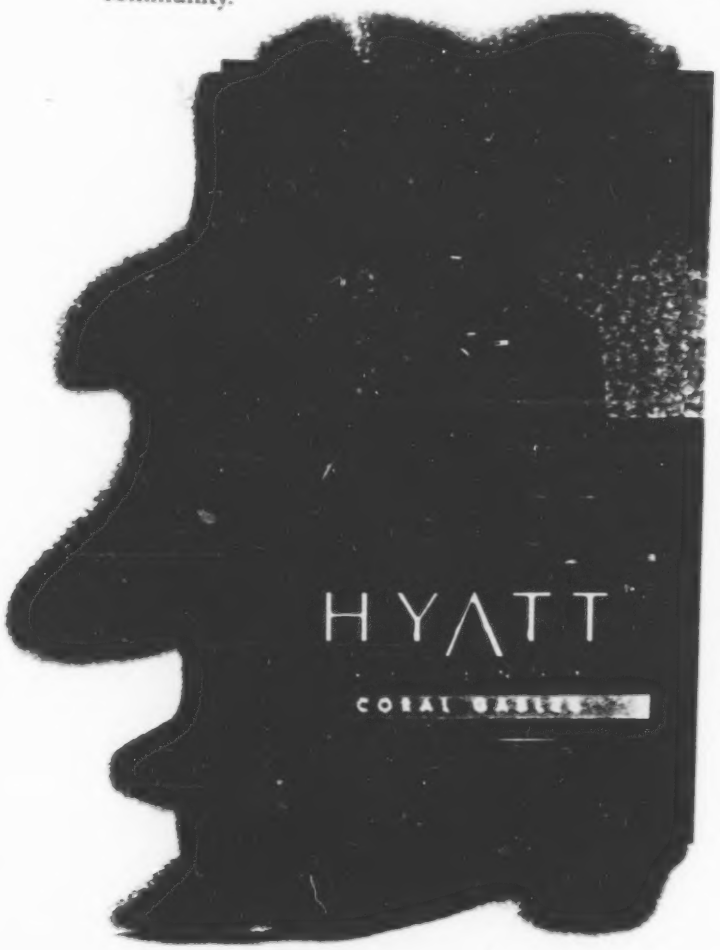
Day Two General Session:
Elementary Level—Yvonne Allen

"Blue Ribbon Schools: The Journey's Just Begun"

"It takes all of us working together collectively to provide an environment of educational excellence for America's children," Yvonne Allen told listeners in the Elementary-Level General Session. "It is a journey started by a dream, a vision, a commitment, and a dedication to excellence."

Allen shared her personal journey, as principal at Whiteville Elementary School, a school once known as "the graveyard" in rural west Tennessee for its deadness of spirit. Low student self-esteem, low morale among teachers, and poor academic achievement characterized this school in 1979.

Yet, says Allen, "I was able to dream of how I would resurrect the school known as 'the graveyard'....Whiteville Elementary School would never again be referred to as 'the graveyard'—but always as a center of academic excellence." Whiteville Elementary became a Blue Ribbon School in 1993, and the school is now the center of the community.



To become a Blue Ribbon School, Allen suggests taking on the role of the "education explorer" on an epic journey: one must dream, prepare, assemble a team, go forth and lead, overcome obstacles, find truth, and share new knowledge.

Allen concluded her presentation by commenting, "In the end, this is the real work of the education explorers: to share all that you have learned, to make it available to others, and to complete the cycle that you started when you began the journey toward becoming a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence."

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Closing Keynote Speakers: Jay Malina and Roger Cuevas

"One Community, One Goal: A Contagious Approach to Educational and Economic Reform"

Thinking to their students' future employment, Miami-Dade educators and community leaders identified areas of business and industry that would be in need of competent workers and set out to align the schools' curriculum to create candidates to meet that need. One Community, One Goal (OCOG) was the resulting community-wide initiative aimed at enhancing job creation and improving public education in Dade County.

The Miami-Dade public school system currently has a poor reputation: critically overcrowded schools, students with low standardized test scores, and graduates lacking competency in basic skills. These factors contribute to the perception that Miami-Dade schools are "unacceptable," thus discouraging businesses and industries from relocating there. In addition to the problems with the public school system, Dade County projects a shortfall of 120,000 jobs by the year 2005, when the population is expected to have grown by 500,000. The OCOG initiative intends to strengthen the economic-development partnership between the education and business communities. OCOG's goals include preparing a skilled, technical workforce for the community's industries and creating a world-class education system that holds students to higher standards of achievement. Suggested school changes include employing a competency-based curriculum, raising educational standards, supporting literacy in at least two languages, offering alternative education programs at each school site, and improving technical preparation and vocational continuing education programs.

The group, expecting the greatest job growth in non-college-graduate technical fields, identified seven industries as being fast-growing, with high-paying jobs and opportunities for upward mobility. These targeted industries include

- Biomedical
- Film and Entertainment
- Financial Services
- Information Technology
- International Commerce
- Telecommunications
- Tourism

To address the need for jobs in these areas, OCOG supports the creation of a new type of school—an industry-focused high school—in the form of a biomedical or biotechnical academy, with special emphasis on math and science instruction. Specialty high schools focusing on the seven emerging industries will emphasize technical skills and knowledge over general academics. The group believes that educators must concentrate on the changing needs of employers and the changing workplace environment to prepare students and that the subsequent creation of a well-educated, skilled workforce will ensure an economically viable community.

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Learning-Centered Schools Criteria

- Student focus and support
- Challenging standards and curriculum
- Teaching and active learning
- Learning-centered culture and organization
- Professional communities
- Leadership and organizational vitality
- School, family, and community partnerships
- Indicators of success

Application and Review Process

- Select school site committee
- Prepare application
- Forward to district/state
- State forwards recommendations to U.S. Department of Education
- National Review Panel (NRP) recommends schools for site visits
- Site visits conducted/reports submitted to NRP
- NRP reviews site visit reports
- NRP recommends schools for recognition
- Selected schools participate in national ceremony

Tips for Success

- Include all stakeholders
- Select a steering committee
- Segment the task
- Assign editors
- Discover district and state procedures for school nomination

What Counts

- Overall quality of written document
- Complete descriptions of school policies, programs, and practices
- Results obtained
- Content and style
- Maintaining technical specifications

Preparing the School Self-Assessment

Part I

- Used to determine whether a school meets eligibility criteria

Part II

- Seeks background and demographic information about the school and the district

Part III

- Provides a brief summary or "snapshot" of the school

Part IV

- Asks for a statement of the school's vision or philosophy
- Invites descriptions of the school in response to specific questions that reflect learning-centered criteria

Part V

- Optional section/special emphasis areas

The information in Parts II-IV is used by the National Review Panel to understand the school context and, if the school is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, for public information purposes.

Action Planning Meetings Section

Action Planning: Florida/Mississippi

Sunday 10:45 AM-12 Noon

Overview of Discussion

- Participants from Mississippi, Florida, and some private schools discussed the process in their states.
- Representatives from Blue Ribbon Schools described their experiences at site visits.
- Sharon Bobbitt of the U.S. DOE Blue Ribbon Schools Unit discussed the review process at the national level, covering in detail several aspects of the assessment criteria and the special recognition areas.
- The group discussed other national recognition programs and offered suggestions on reaching out to other schools and starting on next year's application.

Where Do We Go from Here?

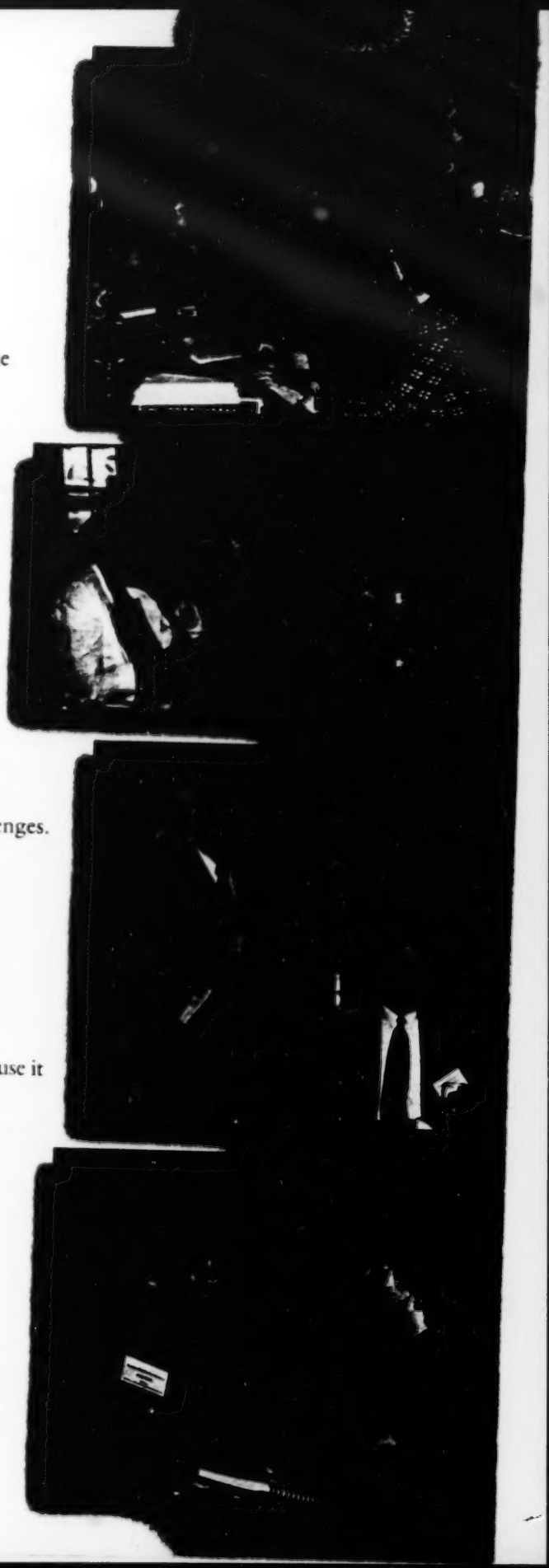
- Attend meetings that offer practical ideas that can be put into use.
- Share what you learn with your school community.
- Make connections with other schools with similar challenges.
- Don't try to change the world, but do engage.

Action Planning: Alabama/Georgia

Sunday 10:45 AM-12 Noon

Overview of Discussion

- Professional grant writers cannot write the application because it will "lack heart."
- When you go into a Blue Ribbon School, you can feel the excitement.
- It is important to use a small core group of writers to create a "flow" to the application.
- Have an outsider read the application and give feedback.
- Site visits (two full days) are verifications of what was in the application, not an evaluation.
- There are six people on the Blue Ribbon staff and over 500 applications a year.
- State liaisons are encouraged to get urban and rural schools into the process.



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Other Recognition Programs in the States

- Alabama has some district and regional programs but not any large state initiatives.
- Georgia has "Pay for Performance," which requires an incredible amount of documentation to show you have reached 85 percent of your objectives for the year, and "State Schools of Excellence," a necessary award before applying for national recognition programs, including Blue Ribbon Schools.

Action Planning: Kentucky/Tennessee

Sunday 10:45 AM-12 Noon

Overview of Discussion

- This was a "nuts and bolts" session on developing applications.
- Reapplying schools must wait five years to show what improvements have been made since their first recognition and how they have shared information.
- No more developing schools should apply unless they have unusual demographics.
- Appalachia Educational Laboratory offers to develop homepage for Blue Ribbon Schools without a site.
- American School Directory (asd.com) has a site for every school in the U.S.
- Tennessee has no state recognition program at this time but is looking forward.
- Kentucky has Kentucky's Blue Ribbon Schools.
- National recognition is available for 10 schools each year through the Model Professional Development Awards.
- Collaboration is available with Regional Educational Laboratories.

Action Planning: North Carolina/South Carolina

Sunday 10:45 AM-12 Noon

State Recognition Programs—Suggestions for Modification

- Create a "model" for the state that serves several purposes—school improvement, planning and development, accreditation, etc.
- Change the title of the School Improvement Committee to the Educational Excellence Committee.
- Establish a clearinghouse for schools that have model programs but have not been recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools to form a database.
- Link NOVA's Website to South Carolina's Department of Education.
- Establish a program for recognition in reading.
- Continue awards programs for principals, parents, community, and businesses.

Where Do We Go from Here?

- Have a similar conference within our states.
- Use South Carolina as a model for other states, and have regional conferences.
- Match Blue Ribbon Schools as mentors to urban/rural schools that want to apply.
- Establish regional model schools (of varying demographics) for other schools to visit.
- Identify existing schools' expertise and disseminate information for others to use (for example, various components of the application).
- Establish a listserv to foster communication and networking about Blue Ribbon Schools.
- Place information on Blue Ribbon Schools on the state department's homepage and link to a listing of all Blue Ribbon Schools in the state.
- Promote the application process at the high-school level.
- Establish partnerships with the business community.
- Publicize the state's Blue Ribbon winners in more depth.
- Promote the program through student councils, honor societies, etc.
- Keep the focus on child-centered education.
- Incorporate information into higher education courses to inform future administrators about the program.
- Get the district superintendent invested in the application process.

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Think Tanks

Summary of Teachers Think Tank

(Morning Session)

From your perspective, what factors about your school distinguish it as an exemplary school?

- Parent and community involvement
- Innovative new programs
- Team approach (administrators, teachers, students) to setting goals
- Administrators willing to let teachers take risks with new programs

How does your school ensure teaching and learning to high standards?

- By offering different programs that target student needs
- Through all stakeholders working together toward a common goal
- Through unique testing/diagnostic tools that stay with students from grade to grade
- By partnerships with mentoring programs
- Through a dress code and state policies that encourage high levels of achievement

Describe ways in which your school creates a caring community of students, educators, parents, and other community members.

- High parent involvement (PTA, etc.) and respect for parents
- Partnerships with business (space for meetings, etc.)
- Work with local institions of higher education, chambers of commerce, community organizations
- On-site daycare centers
- Retreats and small groups to explore ethics and values
- "Sunshine Clubs" (hospitality groups, newsletters with personal updates)
- Community service activities

How does your school involve families, businesses, and other community members in the education of students?

- PTA and Parent Centers
- GED training
- A checkbook system tied to homework completion and discipline
- Strong business partnerships
- Loyalty to country and community emphasis (e.g., flag-raising)
- Career Weeks
- Mentoring
- Community service required with specific standards
- E-mail exchange
- Career shadowing

What do you perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of charter schools?

Advantages:

- Extended hours
- Children networked from home to school
- Flexibility

Disadvantages:

- Not well understood by community

Summary of Administrators Think Tank

(Morning Session)

From your perspective, what factors about your school distinguish it as an exemplary school?

- A school climate that is conducive to learning—a happy, well organized, safe, nurturing, and academically rich environment
- Parent/community involvement
- Strong academic programs
- Instruction that is personalized and emphasizes mastery of content
- Teamwork and collegiality of staff
- Shared decision making
- Technology used as a tool of instruction

School organization is critical to effective teaching and learning. How has your school changed any organizational factors to maximize results in the last five years?

- Restructured day to increase time spent on reading, writing, and math (elementary)
- Teaming utilized more
- Block scheduling (middle and elementary)
- Integrated curriculum
- Grade-level planning

Performing to high standards as shown by student achievement test scores is the bottom line in schools across the nation. What strategies has your school employed to measure up to increasing accountability demands?

- Comprehensive needs assessment with increased data analysis and diagnosis
- Curriculum alignment within benchmarks, frameworks, and goals
- Changes within school organization and instructional strategies
- School improvement plans with accountability
- Technology integration
- Professional growth opportunities for teachers
- Alternative, authentic assessments
- Preparation for testing, strategies for test-taking
- Tutorial and mentoring programs for increased student success

How is leadership shared at your school? Who or what groups make decisions about curriculum and instruction?

- Leadership teams are composed of parents, teachers, staff, students, community/business leaders, district-level personnel, higher education partnerships
- Examples of leadership teams:
  - Grade-level cluster leaders
  - Principal's cabinet/administration's cabinet
  - School improvement council/committee
  - Interdisciplinary teams
  - Parent advisory council

What is your experience with charter schools, and what do you perceive to be their advantages and disadvantages?

Experience:

- Little experience, plus lack of understanding of charter schools' mission

Advantages:

- Small class sizes
- Theme-based curriculum/strategies
- Creative ideas

Disadvantages:

- Playing field not equitable for funding
- Smaller size—limited offerings

- Collective bargaining with teachers
- Sharing public facilities
- Lack of understanding of charter school process
- Instructor certification questionable
- Few extracurricular activities

How can Blue Ribbon Schools contribute to continuous educational progress in the U.S.?

- By being a model for replication
- Through sharing programs with other Blue Ribbon Schools—to learn about innovative programs and how to implement them
- By acting as a liaison for the community and schools

What lessons have you learned that could inform other schools and districts?

- Successful schools have parent and community involvement.
- A strong staff development program is necessary for all staff.
- Successful schools empower staff to share in decision making and listen to creative ideas.

Summary of Teachers/Administrators Think Tank

(Afternoon Session)

From your perspective, what factors about your school distinguish it as an exemplary school?

- Faculty/staff open to new ideas and willing to try new things
- Parental involvement
- Concern for and knowledge of students as individuals
- Inservice opportunities
- Strong, supportive administration
- Curriculum designed for all learners—something for everyone

How does your school ensure that students learn significant content and perform well?

- Use of alternative, authentic assessments based on the students
- A proactive—not reactive—curriculum, focusing on whole-child development, not just on test performances
- Alignment across students, instruction, assessment, etc.
- Working with other feeder schools, e.g., zone meetings
- Reducing or eliminating tracks—all students held to high standards
- Common final exams on subjects
- Specialized teaching across classes and grades and co-teaching/assisting others
- Whole school focused on the students

Describe ways in which your school creates a caring community of students, educators, parents, and other community members.

- Parent volunteers
- Community buy-in

- Respectful environment
- Peace curriculum
- Expectations for students
- Teaming and scheduling
- Middle school students mentoring elementary school students
- Middle school students assigned a high school advocate
- Integrating character into curriculum (for parochial: integrating faith)
- Attitudes analysis
- Rewarding good behavior
- Advising program

How does your school involve families, businesses, and other community members in the education of students?

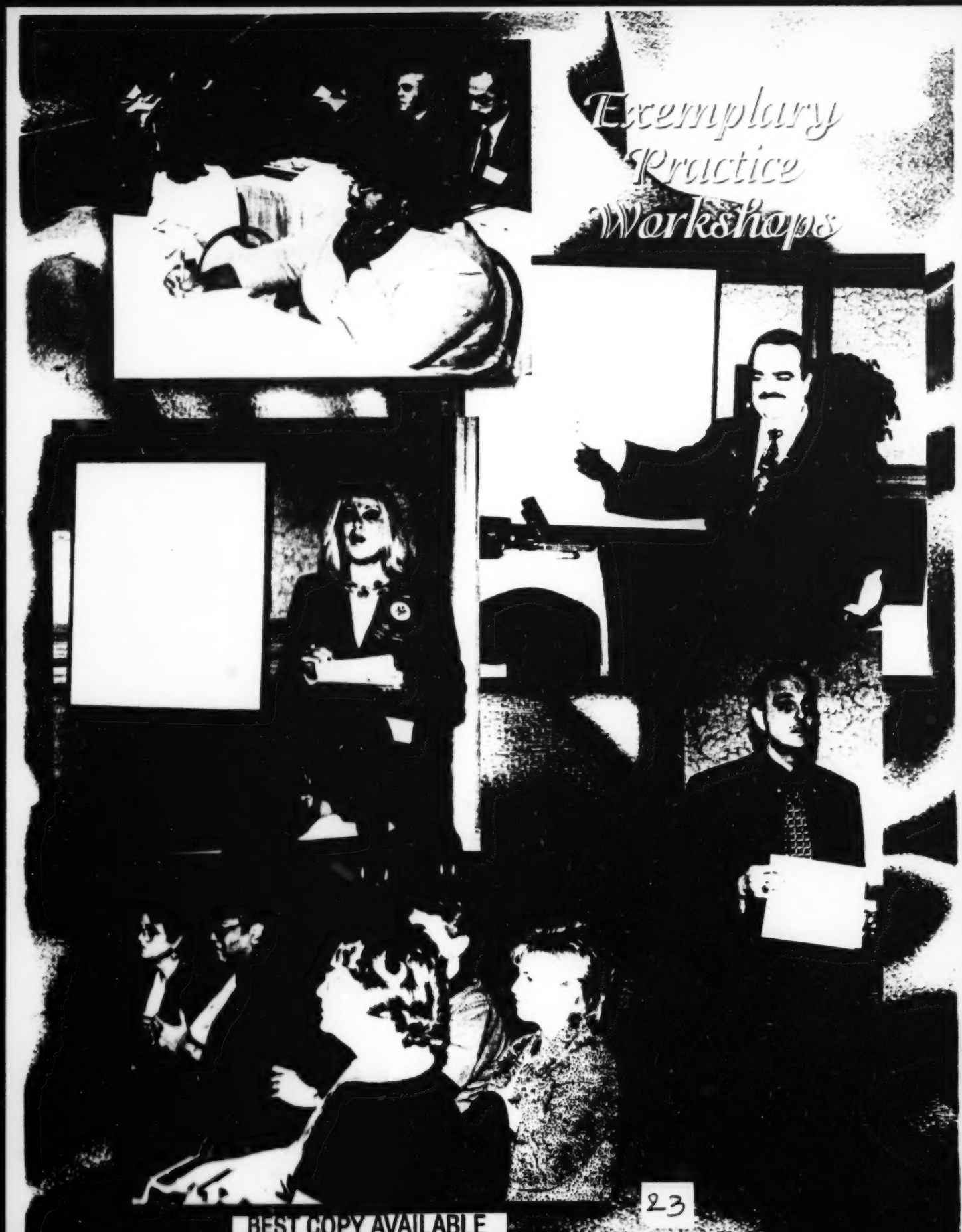
- Sensitivity to the needs of the community
- Resource room for parents—produced more give and take
- Safe place for learning—produced community pride and involvement
- Community recreation—created a place for leisure activities
- Connecting students to the community
- Students visiting senior citizens' homes
- Students visiting business and industry
- Businesses realizing that schools provide their future workforce
- Health and services provided on location
- Mentorships and partnerships
- Job shadowing
- Older students mentoring younger ones
- Items donated to school
- Flexibility with and appreciation for parents
- Flexible scheduling
- Classroom help
- Career Day speakers
- Fund raisers
- Wish trees (granting wishes of teachers)

What is your experience with charter schools, and what do you perceive to be their advantages and disadvantages?

- In theory, they should represent education reform; in practice, the school board wants them to look just like other public schools. We need to step out of the box.
- They don't get the same FTE; they're generally held to the same accountability on fewer dollars.
- The advantages are staff with a vision, teaching experience averaging over eight years, and the typical degree is the master's.
- A big disadvantage is the lack of resources for exceptional children, professional development, etc.
- It's important to try new things and not be afraid to develop new schools. If companies start charter schools to offer students more options, that's good.
- If the charter school closes and those kids go back to the home school unprepared, parents say, "How did you let this happen?" The school board is accountable.

How can Blue Ribbon Schools contribute to continuous educational progress in the U.S.? What lessons have you learned that could inform other schools and districts?

- Sharing with other schools is critical.
- The self-evaluation process allows you to find out what is working and make changes when necessary.
- Blue Ribbon Schools set standards.
- Continuous change is important; never be content to stop where you are.
- Getting a vision and cooperation from the total community is essential.



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Exemplary Practice Workshops

Session A • 9:30–10:20 AM

"Keeping Your School Advisory Council (SAC) Alive"

Donna Kellam Hulsey
904•693•7938

Summary of Presentation

This presentation provided attendees with a cohesive, step-by-step plan for involving education stakeholders in the education process through establishing a Student Advisory Council. Specific strategies were provided for conceiving, building, operating, and improving community involvement that supports the school's vision and mission.

Major Points of Discussion

- Aspirations—a catalyst for action
- Building Blocks—steps to establishing the School Advisory Council
- Continuing Commitment—ingredients for successful and lasting councils
- Outcomes—the worth of these councils

Lessons Learned

- Success is the result of working together.
- When diverse people come together, they bring their special gifts in support of the cause.
- A school's vision is contained in the hopes and dreams of all the stakeholders.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Professional Growth and Collaboration

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Session A • 9:30–10:20 AM

"The Difference is in the 'Details'"

Margaret Haun and Consuelo Dominguez
305•365•6278

Summary of Presentation

The Maritime and Science Technology High School (Miami, Fla.) is a magnet senior high school built around a marine science theme. The recurrent theme and their "thematized" approach to education create a corporate image for the school. The school won the Blue Ribbon in 1995 for the 1994-95 school year.

Keys to their success include their constant vision of the faculty and community and professional development based on individual plans by faculty and group plans by interdisciplinary teachers. The business community and the parents of students are an integral part of the school, and their focus on career and science studies has resulted in a prepared workforce and a college preparatory rate of 96 percent. Elements making this a unique school include the small-school environment, the only high school Coast Guard ROTC, and a senior research colloquial on marine or environmental themes.

Academic Majors

(Literature chosen thematically to complement the program)

- Marine Studies and Culture
- Oceanic and Atmospheric Science Technology
- Maritime and Related Industries

The Professional Development Model

- School and Instructor Plans
- School planning, mission, and vision creation
- Interdisciplinary workshops
- Reading groups
- Best practices sharing

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Major Business and University Partners Give

- Internships
- Awards ceremonies
- Program support/"Academic Symposia"
- School committees
- The common ground of quality
- Broad involvement

The School Gives

- Student art and performances
- Research assistance
- Qualified employees
- Breakfasts

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Challenging Standards

Professional Growth

School and Community Partnerships

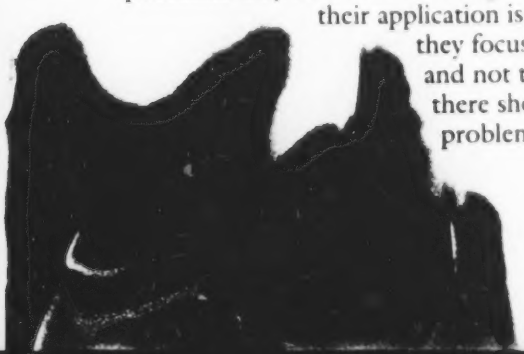
Session A • 9:30-10:20 AM

"Create a World-Class School"

Bartlett Teal
803•734•6231

Summary of Presentation

Bart Teal's presentation addressed the Blue Ribbon criteria. Teal emphasized that the applying school's priority should be the students and not the Blue Ribbon Award. "Don't ever lose that priority," Teal cautioned. "Although school personnel may be nervous during site visits as their application is evaluated, if they focus on the kids and not the award, there should be no problem."



The award cannot be a school's goal; it should be what can be done for the students. The School Improvement Team should design a school around standards, providing students various opportunities, and become a self-study of what is happening. The school should use the Blue Ribbon process to determine strengths and weaknesses, address challenges, and discover solutions. "Kids need to be immersed in activities," noted Teal, "not just sitting in rigid rows. They need to be actually living the curriculum."

Teal shared some examples of Blue Ribbon schools, and then he posed the following question to the audience: "Do you think God put all of these talented kids all together in one high school in South Carolina?" No, he answered; their success is a result of teachers and students participating together in the learning process. To those who would attempt to achieve this award, Teal would advise, "You must work as a team, with students as your ultimate focus."

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

All criteria

Session A • 9:30-10:20 AM

"The Positive Power of Promoting Peace"

Lloyd Hunter, Stacy Ard, and Cantey Carpenter
803•775•0711

Summary of Presentation

A team from Bates Middle School (Sumter, S.C.) presented their program, "The Positive Power of Promoting Peace," in which students learn that there are always other options than violence. The program focuses on solving conflicts peacefully through peer mediation, thus reducing referrals and opportunities for violence.

Some aspects of this program include the following:

- A Peace Council—comprised of faculty, staff, parents, and students who meet to evaluate the programs and to make suggestions for improvement

- Peer Mediators—trained students who help other students solve conflicts peacefully and respectfully
- Peace Flags—awarded to homerooms with no out-of-school suspensions
- Peace Curriculum—made possible by a Carnegie grant; students study peacemaking in Social Studies class
- The Great Wall of Peace—artwork, essays, poems, etc.
- Eagle Referral—a good referral to acknowledge positive, helpful behavior
- RAP Committee—the Respect for All People club for those who want to be role models of respect

Presenters stressed that this type of whole-school program is necessary for true learning to take place because students need to feel safe and content while at school. However, they cautioned, teacher buy-in and support are essential for the program to be successful.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

School and Community Partnerships

Session B • 10:30-11:20 AM

"Educating Students for a Diverse and Changing World through Unique Programs"

Maria Teresa Rojas
305•661•8527

Summary of Presentation

This session's focus was primarily informational in nature, offering an overview of Sunset Elementary School's (Miami, Fla.) vision and mission and including a detailed description of each of its programs and the special projects within them at specific grade levels.

Some of the school's programs include the following:

- Gifted Center—serving gifted students from public and private schools, enhancing critical and creative thinking
- Cluster for Emotionally Handicapped Students—developing and stabilizing emotional growth while meeting academic needs
- Learning Disabilities/Varying Exceptionalities—serving students with difficulties in reading or math
- Pre-K Program—preparing four year olds for future success in school
- International Studies Magnet Program—providing intensive foreign language and cultural studies
- School of Choice—serving the surrounding community, focusing on American history

The presenter stressed the importance of parents, business partners, community partners, and foreign government support, "working together toward one goal."

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Learning-Centered School Context

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Session B • 10:30-11:20 AM

"Collaborative Leadership"

Jerry Hodges and Jim Simpson
606•549•6046

Summary of Presentation

Williamsburg High School, a unique K-12 school in Williamsburg, Kentucky, received the Blue Ribbon in 1992, and through the Kentucky Educational Reform Act and resource help from the

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state, they were able to provide an extended school day and improved technology. Their presentation showed how a reform-minded central office and a school community could remake a school system staff into a central office staff that assists rather than dictates to schools.

The superintendent of a small school district and the principal shared their unique experiences in a vision that was translated into success in a school. The superintendent shared how the state of Kentucky and his district transformed their ideas of central help to meet the new demands of the reform effort, to help form grant proposals to meet federal and state requirements, and to recommend new models and technology resources for schools—while allowing the school community to make the decisions.

The school decides how the budget will be spent. Consultants from the district help with the guidance for the funds. Focus is on the process but not the product. This is a true community school; collaboration makes it work.

To be a Blue Ribbon School, it takes strength in the following areas:

- Student test scores
- Community involvement
- High attendance and low drop-out rate
- Alternative programs
- Climate of the school

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Challenging Standards

School and Community Partnerships

Active Learning

Leadership and Organizational Vitality

Indicators for Success

Session B • 10:30-11:20 AM

"From Engagement to Involvement: Not a Wedding Story"

David Morgan
850•833•4114

Summary of Presentation

This session presented information about Niceville High School (Niceville, Fla.), where the motto is "Get Involved!" and 80 percent of the teachers sponsor clubs. The school's very active booster club raises $40,000 a year with sales of its football program. The principal, David Morgan, believes in the importance of the principal's visibility to students and staff as a role model, and he gets his messages across through a weekly "State of the School Address." Morgan says, "Real change is a process, and everyone must buy into the change for success."

Important steps for success included the following:

- It is essential to have a motto, an easy-to-remember mission statement, and a philosophy of education.
- Student needs are the highest priority.
- Professional development is a key to success.
- The curriculum needs to be relevant and applicable to students.
- All core classes need labs.
- Advertisements, parent newsletters, and signs help to promote the school.

Principal Morgan closed the session by reminding the audience of the bottom line: "All decisions should be based on how they will help teachers teach and students learn."

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

All criteria

Session B • 10:30-11:20 AM

"Communication and Multi-Media Technology: An Integrated Approach"

Patricia Graham, Marshall Ransom, Athena Vachtsevanos, and Bob Downs
904•226•0300 (Graham)

Summary of Presentation

This session focused on a partnership among six schools in six states, collaborating on school change through national standards, online curriculum, new projects, and sharing ideas. The partnership is in its second year of a five-year challenge grant from the federal government for $6 million. Participating schools are located in

- Marietta, Georgia
- Daytona Beach, Florida
- Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
- Omaha, Nebraska
- Las Vegas, Nevada
- Los Angeles, California

Suggestions from the presentation included the following:

- Don't underestimate the importance of grants to adequately fund your projects.
- Make contacts at conferences to discover where the grants are and who might be willing to collaborate with you.
- Become a risk-taker! Apply for everything!
- Send teachers to grant-writing training classes.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Teaching and Active Learning

Indicators of Success

Session C •
11:30 AM-12:20 PM

"A Model for Dealing with At-Risk Populations: Developing an Instructional Process that Supports Student Performance"

Larry Fields, Gwendolyn Johnson, and Patricia Lankpoop
336•727•2310

Summary of Presentation

This session provided an overall philosophy for student achievement, professional development, and school improvement. Specific strategies for school improvement were offered, and the following subjects were explored:

- Keys to successful global learning
- Multiple intelligence strategies
- School climate
- Integrated curriculum in foreign language
- ESL instruction
- Technology instruction and assessment
- Strategic instructional plan
- "Curriculum focus" newsletter
- Home/school coordinators

The presenters from Rowland Hill Latham Elementary (Winston-Salem, N.C.) provided examples of organizational vitality and strong leadership skills.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Learning-Centered School Context

Professional Growth

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

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Session C • 11:30 AM-12:20 PM

"On the Road to Exemplary Writing"

Steve Gambrell and Barbara Dobson
864•949•2370

Summary of Presentation

D. R. Hill Middle School in Duncan, South Carolina, made the growth required to become a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 1997-98. The catalyst for this change was their adoption of the thematic approach of using "writing across the curriculum." Their ultimate success was made possible by an active parent group, dedicated teachers under a dynamic principal, a mathematics teacher whose students "journaled" in math, and an eighth-grade teacher who employed a writing project that crossed all subject areas.

The school has become a "family," and all of the students, including an Educable Mentally Retarded Class of students who helped get the award, get the credit for this transformation. In this session, the team of teachers and administrators presented their strategies and beliefs, which included the basic concept that all students can learn. Their examples included math classes in which the students write about mathematics, using practical problems such as formulating recipes.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus

Teaching and Active Learning

Professional Growth and Collaboration

School/Family Partnerships

Session C • 11:30 AM-12:20 PM

"Organizing for Excellence"

Edwin Hedgepeth
423•966•9775

Summary of Presentation

This presentation focused on Farragut High School (Knoxville, Tenn.) and the role of the principal as the key to a school's success. Principal Hedgepeth delineated the principal's role in facilitating the organization of the school, meeting students' needs, supporting teachers, and "painting the picture to show the vision."

Hedgepeth challenged the audience not to fear change, but to focus instead on creating an intensive program to help teachers. Farragut High School chose the shared leadership and shared ownership of site-based management. Hedgepeth noted that the principal must support the teachers as they strive to break out of "isolation teaching" and as they begin to participate in decision-making processes in the school. The principal needs to "encourage, involve, be committed, and excited."

Further, the principal must create an environment conducive to student learning: "a positive, vibrant, innovative, and energized climate," with more elective opportunities, active teaching and learning, authentic and alternative assessment practices, and celebrations of successes.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Leadership and Organizational Vitality

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Session C • 11:30 AM–12:20 PM

"Chartering a Foundation for Success"

Ed Vosburgh
(and staff of Cartersville Primary School)
770•382•1733

Summary of Presentation

This session focused on Cartersville Primary School (Cartersville, Ga.), a charter school and Blue Ribbon winner for 1996-97.

To enhance their charter school, staff discussed these questions:

- What are we doing that is not working?
- What are we doing that we want to continue?
- What do we want to start doing?

They compiled lists and then narrowed them to the most important for helping student achievement, and then they wrote these into their charter. The governance structure changed, and the planning committee became the central operating system of the school with subcommittees in the following areas:

- Curriculum and instruction
- Staff development
- School improvement
- School climate
- Parent/community involvement
- Discipline

An annual review of programs is conducted to see if any changes need to be made. If parents and staff approve the changes, the charter is amended. One of the greatest benefits of having a charter grant is the opportunity for extensive self-study. A further positive aspect is that, by going through the process of developing a charter, the teachers feel that they have a real stake in the teaching of their students.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Teaching and Active Learning

Leadership and Organizational Vitality

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Indicators of Success

Session D • 2:00–2:50 PM

"Building Successful Partnerships between School, Family, and Community"

Norma Meek
606•739•5515

Summary of Presentation

A family resource center is the missing link for connecting families and communities to schools to benefit the children. The center can leverage grant dollars and community support and involvement, leading to partnerships that grow and expand to meet the needs of children and their families.

The center also provides direct services to children and parents—helping students arrive at school ready to learn each day and helping parents become their child's "first teacher" in the most effective way. Health is a priority here with the following available services:

- Project Fit America—cardiovascular playground
- Breakfast club
- On-site mental health counseling
- Health fair for parents
- CPR/First Aid training for parents and childcare providers
- Vision and dental screenings

Partnerships are the key to making things happen in the schools. They bridge the gap and reduce stress and barriers to learning. Then, the school can do its job of educating children more effectively.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Session D • 2:00–2:50 PM

"Accelerated Programs"

Joseph Clarke
864•594•4421

Summary of Presentation

This presentation advocated placing more students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. "We underestimate the abilities of students. Challenge them!" Joseph Clarke of Spartanburg High School (Spartanburg, S.C.) insisted. "If you offer the AP courses, students will take them."

Even if the student population is diverse, a school can use a large AP program to make the curriculum exciting and excellent for all students. Much preparation and support are needed from parents, community, and teachers, but it is worth the effort, according to Clarke, whose school boasts 600 AP students out of 1700. Spartanburg High offers 25 AP courses that support the entire curriculum—including tech prep, school-to-work, and college prep. Other excellent opportunities at the school include the symphony orchestra and summer science research programs.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Teaching and Active Learning

Indicators of Success

Session D • 2:00–2:50 PM

"Parent Engagement"

Carolyn Lee Taylor, Marie Sweeney, and Denise Posey
334•473•9061

Summary of Presentation

Parent participation at Phillips Magnet School (Mobile, Ala.) has been the key to their success. "We work at being invitational to parents," noted the principal. "We show respect for all parents, and we use the parents' expertise, whatever it may be." Parents and school work together toward the goal that all children—with no exceptions—graduate prepared to go on to high school.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Session D • 2:00–2:50 PM

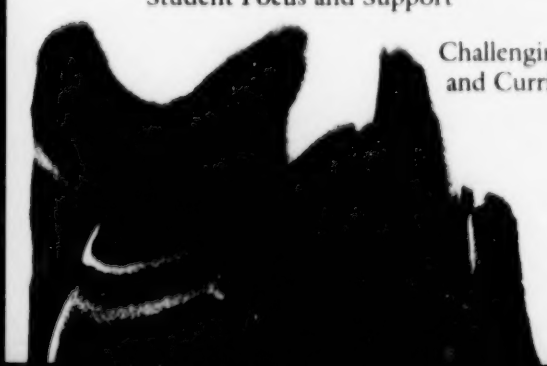
"Mentoring Potential Blue Ribbon Schools"

Melanie Fox
305•448•1731

Summary of Presentation

This session overviewed the steps to becoming a Blue Ribbon School. Melanie Fox, principal of Coral Gables Elementary School (Coral Gables, Fla.), shared her experiences as an applicant and as a BRS panelist. Information included

- Completing the application takes 2-3 months.
- Only completely truthful applications should be submitted; the document becomes public information.
- Assistance is available through state departments of education.



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- The curriculum section should offer more than a list of textbooks.
- The whole process is good as a self-assessment even if the school decides not to apply.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Learning-Centered School Context

Session I • 3:00-3:50 PM

"Building a Dream Team"

Katherine Howard, Susan Hill, Mary Heaton, and Vicki Williams
864•967•1866

Summary of Presentation

Speakers from Bethel Elementary (Simpsonville, S.C.) summarized the many levels of teaming existing in the school—professional teams, school themes supported through teamwork, classroom themes driving the integrated curriculum, and student services teams. In addition, they emphasized that building one-on-one contact is very important—teacher-parent, teacher-teacher, teacher-administrator, parent-administrator, parent-student, student-teacher, student-student, student-administrator, etc. Their philosophy centers on treating the child as a whole person and part of a family, which leads to greater student self-esteem and achievement. Supporting parents and providing services to parents is part of the process.

Teamwork makes the job easier. By working together, tasks are accomplished more quickly with less duplication and more time available to add creativity to the curriculum. Partnerships are essential for making things happen, but the school has the responsibility of initiating the contacts. Partnerships through the community and grants for innovative ideas help to carry out the "bright ideas" that come from teamwork. Presenters reminded the audience to take time to remember the mission that makes the great ideas possible.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Teaching and Active Learning

Learning-Centered School Context

Professional Growth and Collaboration

Session I • 3:00-3:50 PM

"Technology in Education: New Horizons for Blue Ribbon Schools"

Emilio Gonzalez and Chris Gentile
800•986•3223 ext. 8777 (Gentile)

Summary of Presentation

This session provided educators with a strategic overview of the opportunities and challenges ahead in preparing schools for the 21st century. The focus was on problems as opportunities for technology improvement.

Technology Challenges

- While 77 percent of schools have Internet access, only 22 percent of the classrooms have access.
- Only one in ten teachers has received professional development for integrating technology.
- The ratio of modern computers to students in schools is about 15:1 (5:1 is ideal).
- Electrical capacity is insufficient in many schools.

A long-term vision is vital to success—knowing where you want to be in the future, while remaining flexible. Make sure the plan has milestones, allows for scaling-up, and employs constant evaluations. Look for strategic partners, and stay informed. There is a great deal of federal and private money available for improving technology in schools, but to make the money accomplish something, strong leadership is needed from the principal and a broad-based committee that can sell the vision to the community.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Leadership and Organizational Vitality

School and Community Partnerships

Session E • 3:00-3:50 PM

"Success in a Blue Ribbon School: A Continuous Journey"

Robbie Miller, Elizabeth Mosley, Tina Scholtes, and Dianne Faulk
601•324•4150

Summary of Presentation

Sudduth Elementary (Starkville, Miss.) uses kindergarten centers to develop creativity, cognitive, listening, and motor skills, among others. Sudduth uses volunteers to provide one-on-one assistance. The school also provides a family services center, a professional development center, and an adult education center.

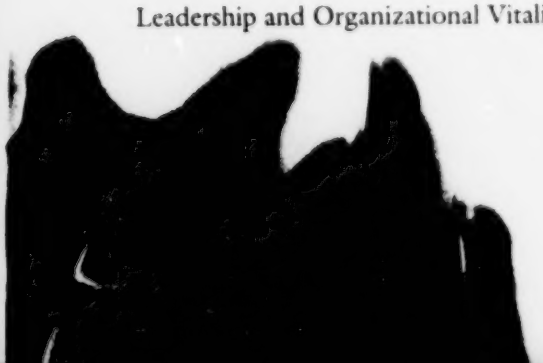
With the Success for All reading program, children in grades 1 and 2 are assessed every eight weeks and reassigned reading groups as indicated. Grouping is across age lines, and they use cooperative learning to promote success. As a result, the school has seen a significant rise in test scores.

In addition, teachers as leaders have made a difference in the school district. They used teacher groups to plan the merging of two schools, conduct school renewal for a SACs review, and provide opportunities for new teachers to become members of the school family.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Challenging Standards and Curriculum

Leadership and Organizational Vitality



Session E • 3:00-3:50 PM

"Exemplary Journalism and Advances in Technology at a Coalition School"

Bill Cherry and John Pulford
803•765•2309

Summary of Presentation

This session focused on the integration of coursework with technology, emphasizing the use of the Internet and electronic portfolios. The subject of journalism was used as an example to show how technology can be a tool to make learning accessible.

Also, the Web may be used to develop student portfolios that may be assessed by potential employers, the military, and college admissions officers. These portfolios may contain personal and academic pages that present a comprehensive picture of the student's talents and skills.

For more information and handouts, check out www.heathwood.org/scaet.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Student Focus and Support

Teaching and Active Learning

Session F • 4:00-4:50 PM

"Achieve Higher Levels of Educational Excellence: Learning from Business and the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award"

Rick Fernandez
(phone not available)

Summary of Presentation

The session first made the case that education is similar to business. The speaker then explored areas of organization, outcomes, goal setting,

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and stakeholders. He used the Baldrige Award criteria in examining effective schools.

The presenter emphasized that it is important to have a process in place that can help, over time, to create predictable outcomes and be successful. This approach must be clear and accepted throughout the organization and deployed throughout the culture. The leader will need to then measure how well the approach worked and learn from what's been done. From this, it will be clear how outcomes were reached.

The leader will need to determine direction by focusing on students and stakeholders through strategic planning. This becomes the basis by which everything else is driven. How do you align staff focus with the culture you have created? Share the direction, and create the information and analysis base for assessing it.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Leadership and Organizational Vitality

Session F • 4:00-4:50 PM

"Getting the Team to Work Even When There is a 'Cast of Thousands'"

Judith Klinek, Paulette Fetzer, Susie Stanley, and Scott Curry
561•883•8000

Summary of Presentation

Loggers Run Community School (Boca Raton, Fla.) believes it is a true community school—open 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekends. They even have an assistant principal who is responsible for evening activities. The school makes every effort to provide the community with everything people need, and they have developed some unique partnerships. They have a culminating event each year for all the partners.

They offer many academic programs, including remediation and enrichment, and they provide an adult community school with courses in life skills, computers, crafts, athletics, GED, etc. The school also leases space to the public for meetings, classes, clubs, etc. Volunteers staff many activities as coaches, homework hotline staff, newsletter staff, etc.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Teaching and Active Learning

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Session F • 4:00-4:50 PM

"Innovations in Technology in Education"

Mike Hall
912•988•6340

Summary of Presentation

This session presented the following idea: "The measure of success of technology in your school is not the accumulation of hardware and software but the ability to use it everyday by students and staff." Different programs were discussed and evaluated—from teaching software to distance learning to recordkeeping capabilities for school staff.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Professional Growth and Collaboration

Leadership and Organizational Vitality

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Session F • 4:00-4:50 PM

"Together We Can: A Partnership for Media Excellence"

Lizzie Padget, Martha Roberts, and Paulette Williams
803•782•0470

Summary of Presentation

This session, involving staff from Forest Lake Elementary School (Columbia, S.C.), overviewed a collaboration for instructional excellence among teachers, the media specialist, and the technology specialist under the leadership of the principal. Presenters stressed that "Curriculum drives the use of technology—not the opposite." Protocols and standards for information literacy were covered, and products of the collaboration were discussed.

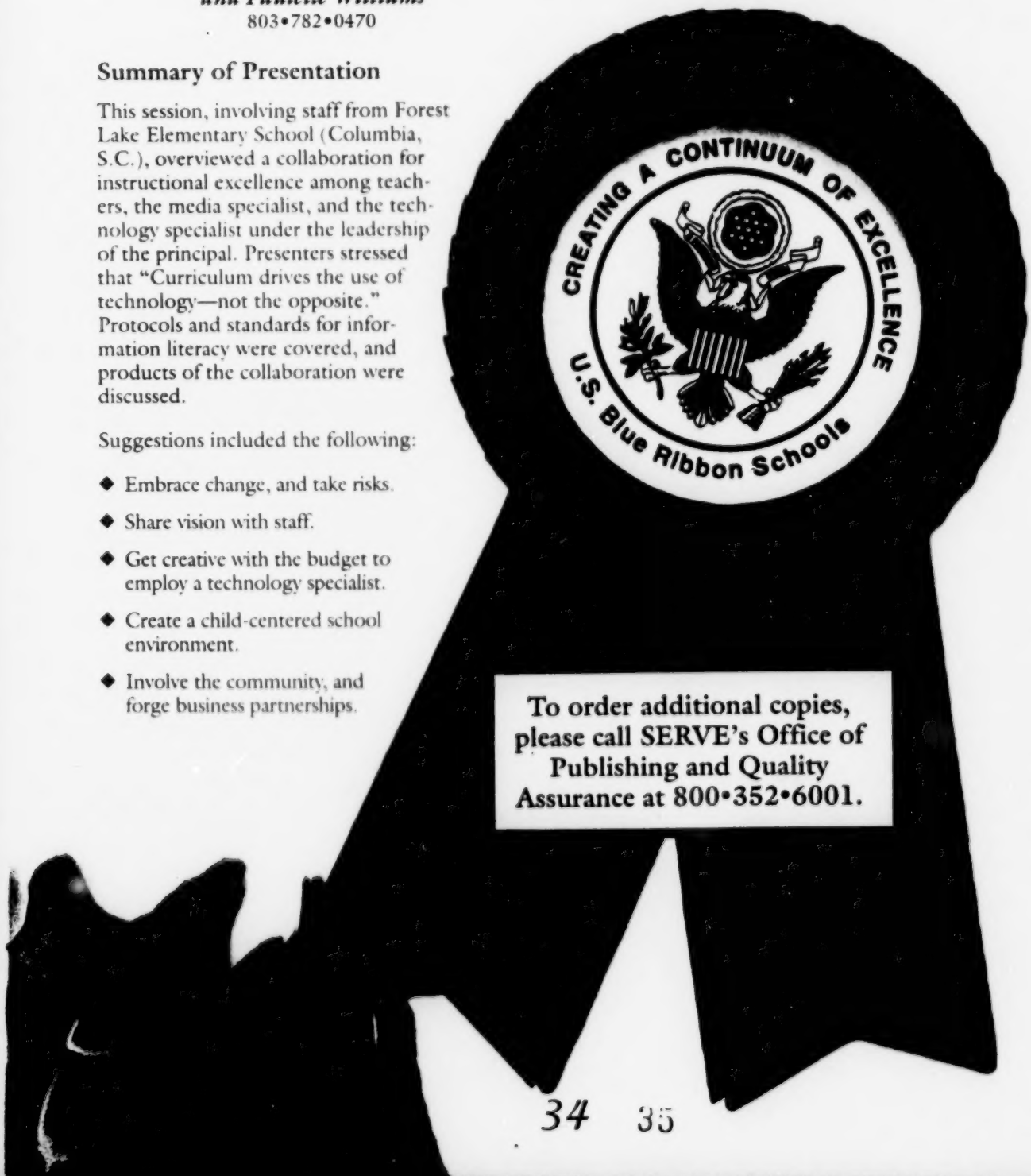
Suggestions included the following:

- Embrace change, and take risks.
- Share vision with staff.
- Get creative with the budget to employ a technology specialist.
- Create a child-centered school environment.
- Involve the community, and forge business partnerships.

Forest Lake's principal stressed that their school's excellence had been attained even with 45 percent of the students qualifying for the free/reduced lunch program.

Session Supports These Blue Ribbon Criteria

Challenging Standards and Curriculum



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Opening Session:

- Entertainment by children was GREAT! (Especially enjoyed the jazz band!)
- I heard that the Opening Session was incredible! I was disappointed that we had a late arrival.

Friday Evening:

- The Venetian Pool was fabulous!
- WOW!! What a wonderful night!
- Education usually doesn't do things on this scale—this is usually reserved for the corporate world! First class!
- Very best part of the conference. Met with two state groups to talk about Blue Ribbon progress and network and share ideas.
- The pool was beautiful and the food delicious.

Saturday General Sessions:

- Yvonne Allen was excellent!
- Dr. Jenkins had wonderful things to share.

Exemplary Practices:

- Lots of information!
- Bethel Elementary presentation was outstanding!
- Mast, Coral Gables, and Forest Lake were great.

Sunday Breakfast with Keynote Speakers:

- Very positive.
- Breakfast was exquisite!
- Incredible vision by business/education partnership.

General Comments:

- The conference was wonderful—excellent planning and a fine start for what I hope will become an annual event.
- Successful schools need to share with others if we are to have true school reform across the country.
- This was a wonderful conference overall. I am going back with many ideas for my school. Hats off to the organizers.
- A class act from beginning to end.
- Thanks for a great weekend!

Think Tanks:

- Best part of conference for me.

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